

## Counter-Cultural Attitudes & Actions Romans 12:9-21

Our Father doesn't discipline us with a whip, but with his Word.

This text is a gift as it should make us more like Jesus.

It's one of my favorite texts on **what it means to be the church.**

- The heading in ESV simply says, **"Marks of the True Christian."**
- It's about **what it means to live out the Christian life, particularly in community.**
  - **Community** is the new emphasis in Romans (Gospel: 1-11; Community: 12:1ff)
  - How the gospel is supposed to work out in daily life among God's people.
  - Romans 1-11 had some sections that were difficult to understand.
  - Romans 12:9-21 is not really that difficult to understand – **it's difficult to live!**
  - That's because it's about **relationships!**
  - **How many of you know that Relationships are challenging?**
    - Linus, **"I love mankind; it's people I can't stand."**
    - **It's easier to love the idea of the church than real people in a real church!**

**This is why we need the regular renewal of our minds! (Rom 12:2)**

- **Renewed minds leads to attitudes, relationships, & practices -- that are not conformed to this world.**
- It is easy to do the **opposite** of these instructions:
- **We need hearts saturated in grace to live these instructions out.**

**These instructions were difficult for the b House Churches in Rome**

(*Reading Romans in Pompei* by Peter Oakes)

- They were small house churches of **30-40 people** in most cases (though they could have been larger depending on meeting location).
- They were typically made up of mainly **craft workers** ("working with your hands" 1 Thess 4:11; Acts 20:18:3," various degrees of income among them from lower-class craft workers more wealthy **cabinet makers**), but would have also included **slaves, freed slaves, a few homeless people, a few migrant workers & a few elites.**
- It was a very **hierarchical culture** -- which made these commands very counter-cultural

**They are difficult for Us --** What characterizes our culture? I'll mention 4 challenges:

1. **Isolation/independence**, (eg., **the suburban way of life**).
  - *The Globe* just ran a story showing that the greatest threat to middle aged men today is **loneliness**, not smoking or obesity. They have lost contact w/ friends.
  - **Rom 12 is not a privatized vision of life! It's a communal vision.**
2. Our tech culture has produced **a loss of empathy** and **the ability to have conversation** (see *Reclaiming Conversation* by Professor Turkle at MIT).
  - It has also produced a lot of **counterfeit community**.
  - "Let love be genuine." "Show affection." Hard to do that online!!
  - **Example: Interpersonal Relationship Skills class now offered online!!!**

3. We live in **an impatient culture**. This high-speed, instant-information, tech world, has also made people expect immediate results in everything. **“Patient in tribulation?”**

4. We live in **an age of rage**; liberal outrage, political outrage; religious outrage...

- **Media** plays into this anger culture. Everyone is mad.
- **Movies** are filled with revenge as a dominant theme: Man on Fire, Taken. Madea.
- **It's built into the fabric of society.** It's part of our entertainment and communication.
- As those swimming in this society, Xian try to justify their anger claiming it's righteous indignation when in reality **much**, if not **most**, of our anger is **not righteous!**
- We should take anger as seriously as Jesus does.
- **It's not something to be proud of; it's something to repent of.**
  - Jesus ties anger to murder (Matt 5:21ff).
  - The best justice advocates were/are not filled with anger.
  - They were motivated by love.
  - **MLK Jr.** “You must not harbor anger ... we should love our enemies.” (Autobio)
  - **Bonhoeffer:** “The disciple must be entirely innocent of anger, because anger is an offense both God and neighbor.”
  - They embodied so many of these principles in Romans 12. **“Hating evil” yet loving enemies** and more. They lived out Micah 6:8, walking humbly.

**The best shot we have in giving an attractive witness in today's world is by doing something radically different – namely, loving people.**

- We must **not** join in this rage culture.
- Schaffer called **love** “**the final apologetic.**” - the ultimate proof that the gospel is true.
- **Sometimes people are more attracted to the Christian community before they're attracted to the Christian gospel.** The need to see the gospel at work: hospitality, generosity, sympathy, harmony – this is what the gospel does.

The fact is, if these verses were lived out faithfully, **it would radically change our world.**

- It changed the first century Greco-Roman world - **the church as a counter-culture**, as a **little outpost of the Kingdom of God.**
- They said to the world, **“You want to know what the kingdom is like -- here's a glimpse.”** It's not perfect but it's a glimpse.
- In the kingdom, there's love, honor, harmony, zeal for the Lord.
- **When we fail** we forgive one another and reconcile; that too is a display of the kingdom

**Romans 12:9ff – Ragbag of Exhortations or Ingredients of Love?**

This passage includes a list of ingredients for the **recipe of Christian love.**

**Perhaps we should add this to our IDC Recipe book!?** (New fav book!)

- **V 9** serves as **the heading** of 9-21 (so Moo; D. Black & more)
- The **order** is like **1 Corinthians: spiritual gifts/body** (1 Cor 12/Rom 12:3-8); and then the famous “**love** chapter” (1 Cor 13/Rom 12:9-21).
- So **this is like the “love section” of Romans.**
- While not every verse addresses the subject of love to the same degree, I think it's fair to say that love is the **common motif** of the whole section in Rom 12:9-21.

## Big Idea:

**Paul shows us what Christ-like love in *attitude* and *action* looks like.**

These attitudes and actions are **motivated, empowered, and shaped** by the gospel, and they are counter-cultural.

**Two Simple Parts: (1) Attitudes and Actions w/in the Church (9-13, 15-16), and (2) Attitudes and Actions Toward our Enemies (14, 17-21).**

- This isn't a hard fast division, for *there is some cross over from within and without*, but even so, I think this arrangement catches the main emphasis of each verse.

### #1: Attitudes and Actions within the Church (9-13, 15-16)

#### A. "Let love be genuine" (9a)

Love without hypocrisy -- **without play-acting.**

- Real love is **sincere**.
- **It is marked by a compassion that leads to action.** (1 Jn 3:11-18)
- Christian love is **not** marked by **mere platitudes**.

**In the original context, life was structured around **formal relationships** that included the **expectation to act in accordance with one's role in society.****

- **One's heart did not always align with those actions.**
- **Love was ritualized**, not sincere, not from the heart.
- So this command was (and still is!) counter-cultural.

**Don't be a fake. Be quick to forgive, apologize, and show mercy and grace.**

#### B. "Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (9b)

- **Love is not blind sentiment.**
- **Love doesn't allow evil to persist in the name of "love."**
- **Love actually hates certain things. It's holy love.**
- Two strong words
  - **Abhor** – hate it exceedingly, **not just dislike evil.**
  - **Cling** – like in a marriage
- **Love is not genuine when it **leads** a person to do something evil, **allows** a person to do evil, or when it **avoids addressing evil.****
- Today: **"If you really love, then you won't make any distinctions – you should be able to do whatever you want."**
  - That idea comes from a low view of the holiness of God.
- **Love knows the difference between right and wrong.**
- **You can't parent without this kind of love -- you don't allow your child to do anything in the name of love. Did you let your 5yr old drive to church today because she's so cute?**
  - **Rus Moore, "You are always discipling your children, the only question is what are you discipling them toward."**

God is holy and there is such a thing as **good** and **evil**.

- "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isa 5:20).
- The church must hate what God hates, and love what God loves.
- We're to be **known for doing good: v. 21, 13:3.**

### C. “Love one another with brotherly affection” (10a)

Let there be **tenderness, warmth and affection**.

- Two family words:
  - “**Philostorgoi**” (loving dearly)
  - “**Philadelphia**” (affection) – brotherly/sisterly love
- **Affection can be expressed in a variety of ways -- but the idea is that we’re family.**

This was **a radical command in the Roman context**.

- **Levels of affection varied** between spouses, servants, etc.
- The church provided a **new kind of family**.
- **This would have been a massive encouragement to those *without families*, such as migrant workers, servants, certain races, and those rejected by their biological families when they became Christians.**

We live out that kind of family affection here on Sundays, but our growth groups function more like these Roman house churches --place of warmth, love, attention, fellowship, etc

### D. “Outdo one another in showing honor.” (10b)

Another **radical command in the first century, hierarchical world**.

**Oakes: “If, at church I hold a door open for someone, it is not revolutionary, whoever it may be. In the first-century house church, if a slave held a door open for their master, no one would notice. If a master held a door open for a slave, this would be very radical.... giving each person honor individually ... in first-century terms is outrageous.”**

**We live in a culture of dishonor; when we honor another, we too are going against the grain of society.**

- We have different reasons for honoring that much of the culture --
  - The **imago dei** -- everyone is worthy of dignity, honor and respect, and to dishonor a person is to dishonor the God who made them. And for the Christian, we have an added reason: We **honor the Lord Jesus’ blood bought people**.

**Let me encourage you to find ways this week to honor someone – surprise them with an act of honor.**

- **It can be a leader, but it doesn’t have to be.**
- **This text says we must honor one another.**

### E. “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (11)

**Notice the intensity in this verse!**

**Christian love is not cold or indifferent!**

- **“Don’t be slothful in zeal”** (11a) – see **12:8**. Lead w/ enthusiasm.
- **“Be Fervent in Spirit”** (11b) – or “the Spirit” - boil for Christ by the Holy Spirit
- **“Serve the Lord”** -- the object of our zeal.
  - **Wrongly directed zeal is dangerous!**
  - **Rightly ordered zeal glorifies God and blesses people.**

**Roman context: certain classes of people were exhorted to work hard.**

What makes this command counter-cultural is that it's **targeted at everyone**, even the **wealthier households are called to work hard**.

### Our context

- Often **the wealthy and powerful are passive when it comes to the church**.
  - Sometimes they like to make suggestions/demands but don't serve passionately.
- **Students can also be tempted to postpone passionate service to Jesus**.
  - We send youth off to war, they build companies, they play professional sports -- **use your youth to serve Christ!**
  - Many Millennials today expect to be leaders without being good followers/learners.
- **People who are they're own boss can often be lazy**.
  - **There are many pastors that are lazy.**

**God is gracious in giving us such a command: God knows our frame.**

- He knows **our passions can cool**. So he exhorts us.
- **The exhortation is to everyone -- Boil for Christ!**
- **The church has always been blessed by hard-working servants**. K Hughes:  
"Luther said he worked so hard that when he went to bed **he literally fell into bed. In fact, one account says he did not change his bed for a year! Now that is tired! [and that's gross!]** Moody's bedtime prayer ... was, "Lord, I am tired. Amen." Calvin's biographers marvel at his output. John Wesley rode **sixty to seventy miles a day and on average preached three sermons a day... True love labors.**"

### Be fervent in Spirit! Serve the Lord!

- I read a lot of biographies. I find them greatly motivating.
- **One thing that characterizes every saint I've read about: none were lazy**. They don't write biographies about lazy people.
- Every Christian **in a privileged part of the world**, must always ask, **"Do I love comfort too much? Has it become an idol? Has it caused me to shrink back from passionate service to the Lord Jesus?"**

### F. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." (12)

- There's not a day in the Christian's life in which we don't need to hear this verse.
- **Perseverance** unites these three phrases.
- Romans 8:18-30; 5:2-5 - hope, suffering, and prayer.
- It was a very relevant exhortation in the Roman context for several reasons:
  - **Persecution** (a subject he will address in 17-20)
  - **The way of life then** -- less medical care & oppression built into society, & more.

### "Be patient in tribulation"

- **"Lord give me patience. Right now!"**
- Endure in the midst of trials.
- Chandler: **"Success is obedience for decades."** That won't happen easily.
- What's easy is self-pity and complaining in trials.



- **Coach Mingione -- “Three things you can’t say, ‘I’m hot, I’m cold, or I’m tired.’ If you do, you sit the bench. I want to the play the teams that are hot, cold, tired.”**

**How** do we endure hardship without murmuring and turning inward?

- By applying the other two parts of the verse! Rejoicing **and Praying!**
- If you aren’t rejoicing and praying you won’t be persevering.
- Groaning in prayer, rejoicing in Christ; these are essentially practices for everyday Christian living.

**G. “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” (13)**

**Two practical ways to show love: generosity and hospitality.**

- **“Contribute”** The word group is often associated with financial support: (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Rom 15:26-27; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Gal 6:6; Phil 1:5; 4:15; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 13:16)

**Generosity.** Some of you just need a big thank you! Keep it up!

Others may need a bit of instruction and correction.

- It’s important for you to give to advance the mission.
  - **Ross: “Money is missions ammunition.”** We fire away at the evil one.
  - There are places where Jesus is neither named or known, & your giving helps make the gospel known to people in these places.
- Your giving blesses those in need (Acts 4:32ff).
- Your giving supports the ministry of the church.
- But contributing financially is also for your own spiritual benefit.
  - Jesus ties giving to your heart.
  - If you aren’t generous, it reveals something very troubling about your heart.

If I may get personal...

- If you can pay for a smartphone bill & other comforts, but don't give regularly to your local church, then you should be ashamed; if you pay for a gym membership but don't support the work of your church where you are a member, then perhaps you love your body more than The Body.

**Be a consistent giver.**

- Don’t just give when **“your inspired,”** but as a regular family member.
- **If my kids say they are only doing their chores when they’re inspired, it won’t go well!**
- And if only one kid was doing all the other chores for the rest, we will have a talk with the others. **“Why is your brother carrying you other four?”**

**Be a cheerful giver**

- How do you become a cheerful giver? You remember God is a giver! (Rom 8:32)
- How do you become hospitable? You remember God has welcomed you!! (Rom 15)

**Hospitality (13b)**

**Paul’s day** – Christians lacked accommodations for various reasons.

- Paul enjoyed the hospitality of Priscilla & Aquilla (Acts 18.3), Gaius (Rom 16) & more.
- The **Motive** of Hospitality

- God is the ultimate hospitable one
- **The story of the Bible reflects God's gracious hospitality...**

- The **Attitude** of hospitality here.
  - Peter says do it "without grumbling" (1 Pet 4)
  - **Not:** "Here's a biscuit and a bible; sit down and shut up; I don't want you here"
- The **Intentionality** of Hospitality. **Don't just practice it, "pursue it! (CSB)"** Seek to show it.
- Hospitality is **not entertaining** -- that's often about the host -- it's about serving, loving.

### Quick Action Steps:

- **Use your Home as a means of ministry.**
  - When buying a home, think about how you will host others.
  - Don't think, "**My home is my refuge.**" That's idolatry. Jesus is our refuge -- and we are stewards of everything we have.
  - People have replaced **stewardship with ownership.**
  - You can do some amazing ministry at your house: missionaries/students/aftercare/foster care/safe families/etc.
  - Quick example: **Basketball goal and popsicles will attract all kinds of kids!**
- **Change the way you view pre-worship/post-worship:**
  - Welcome people; meet people; invite people over.
- **Give particular attention to internationals, transient people, and those in need.**
  - We have a city filled with such folks; let's practice this verse.

**V 14** seems is more related to our attitudes and actions to enemies. I'll come back to it.

### **H. "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." (15)**

**Come alongside of people in the highs and lows of life.**

**Don't limit this to funerals and weddings!**

**This would have been radical in a hierarchical culture -- when the elite wept the poor migrant worker!**

Chrysostom said that "**rejoice**" came first because it was **easier to rejoice with those who rejoice than weep with those who weep.**

- Not sure if that's **why** it's first, but I agree **that it's more difficult for most people.**
- It's easier to weep with those who weep because **we fear losing what they have lost.** We identify with their sufferings.
- **It's harder to rejoice because sometimes they have obtained that which we want to obtain – envy and jealousy and competition make it difficult to rejoice.**
- But this is why we need the gospel.
- **A sign of growing in grace is the ability to rejoice at the success of others.**

**What about weeping? How do we do this?**

- You just show up. You sympathize. **You don't need a great speech. Just be there.**

## I. “Live in harmony with one another” (16a)

**1st Century:** The homeless, the migrant worker, the cabinet maker, and elite, the household servants, the Jew and Gentile, are called to live in harmony!

- This was a powerful witness of the kingdom of God in the kingdom of Rome!
- It’s a unity that should reflect the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.
  - “It’s always a unanimous vote within the Trinity. Never do two go off to Applebee’s and talk about the other.” (Doug Logan)
  - True. There’s no gossip in the Godhead!!!
- To live in harmony will mean working through conflict, misunderstanding, miscommunication, wounds, etc.
- It is through those awkward conversations, gracious interactions, sympathy, and repentance, that reconciliation and harmony are experienced.
- Harmony takes hard work.
  - Unity is about taking on the attitudes/actions of this text & texts like Phil 2 & 1 Peter 3:8.

## J. “Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” (16b)

Literally, “not thinking high things [or grandiose ideas] but getting carried away with lowly tasks.” (Witherington)

- A Christian should never say, “This task is beneath me” or “This person is beneath me.”
- Jesus didn’t consider our sinful condition as beneath him.
- One of the signs of gospel transforming us is that we associate with all kinds of people.
- What if Stephen Curry showed up at your growth group? It actually shouldn’t be that strange. People of all classes in the church.
  - Sinclair Ferguson: If we could kidnap unbelievers (legally!) I would like to drop them in the hallway after the services, put signs about each person over their heads, in order to show them how the people of God associate with various people.
- Jesus, “Whatever you’ve done to the least of these, you’ve done it to me.”
- “Associating w/ them is associating w Me.” Don’t be haughty. Associate w/ the lowly.
- Philips para: “Never be condescending, but make real friends with the poor.”
- Put on the mind of Christ, who associated with the lowly.

## Summary of 9-13, 15-16

This is what it means to truly love one another.

This is what it means to be a truly “attractional church.”

This is how they we will know that we are Jesus’ disciples, by our love for one another.

## #2: Attitudes and Actions Toward Our Enemies (14, 17-21)

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” (14)

“Bless” is repeated twice.

- The language has echoes of Jesus’ teaching in Matt 5:44; Lk 6:27-28
- It’s not difficult to understand; it’s difficult to apply. We need the Spirit’s help!

**Roman Context** This was difficult given the frequency of opposition toward the Xian community



- Social ostracism, slander, legal action, public insult, imprisonment, confiscation of property (cf., Heb 10:32-34), physical persecution. and martyrdom are some of the things early Christians faced.

He expounds on the Christian's reaction in the following verse...

**17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

**V. 17: Honor** -- a big theme in the next passage as he talks about the governing authorities. Paul wants the church to be **a people of honor.**

**V. 18** -- He also wants them to be a peaceable people.

**V. 19:** He wants them to trust in the judgment of God to come.

He quotes **Deut 32.35** "leave it to the wrath of God"

- Now, here's the thing, if you don't believe in the wrath God, you can never do this!
- You will always want to take vengeance into your own hands.
- If you really understand God's wrath in a biblical sense, then you know that those who oppose Christ and his people **will get something far worse than your little puny retaliation.**
- I can leave vengeance to God.
- Everyone will be judged either at **the judgment seat** or at **the cross.**
- **In either case, the full measure of the wrath of God will be poured out, and I don't have to seek it as some vigilante.**
- I can entrust it to God.

**V. 20-21**, he quotes from **Prov 25:21-22**, and then again emphasizes doing good not evil.

- **You will overcome evil by God's grace, not vengeance; by goodness, not vitriol.**
- **"The fires of grace will melt the wicked, or they will be hardened by the fires of grace. (Ferguson)**
- How do you find the motivation to love your enemies? **You must look to the cross.**
  - There, Christ loved his enemies.
  - Enemies that were taunting him, cursing and reviling him.
  - Enemies like us.
  - We deserved punishment; we received mercy.

The fact that Paul spends more time on this indicates that he knew the importance of it.

- Most people were part of **some gang or tribe** in the Roman world because **the authorities didn't intervene in the kinds of affairs we have grown accustomed to.**
- The way you responded to enemies was by your group taking up for you (Oakes).

- Paul gives another way; the radical, Jesus way, of loving your enemies.

**Faith in the judgment of God is how you abstain from this culture of hate and violence.**

- Of course, on a civil level, we need courts and law enforcement -- that's **next week's** text.

You may not face a not life-threatening situation this week, but you may very well encounter enemies.

- **Focus on blessing, not vengeance.** Then, wait and see how God works.
- Proverbs 25:22 concludes saying, **“And the Lord will reward you.”**
- **Make it our daily duty to bless people.**
- Surprise them by grace!

## **Conclusion**

What a portrait of love Paul gives us. What counter-cultural attitudes and actions!

**It's really a portrait of Jesus.** Jesus loved the church.

**Jesus loved the church to death.**

1. Jesus loved us w/ a genuine love. Not with religious pretense, but words & actions.
2. Jesus hates what is evil, loves what's good; died for evil people to make them good.
3. Jesus loved the brothers and sisters with brotherly affection. He washed their feet.
4. Jesus was dishonored that we may be honored.
5. Jesus was a man of zeal. He took up the Psalm, “Zeal for your house has consumed me.”
6. Jesus endured the cross, endured tribulation, and was constant in prayer, even on the cross, he is praying for his enemies.
7. Jesus was generous – he became poor, he gave up heaven for a cross, that we might be rich in him.
8. Jesus has shown us hospitality – the friend of sinners is “preparing a place for us.”
9. Jesus loved his enemies; he didn't have a sword in his hand, but nails in his hands, as he prayed for them.
10. Jesus rejoiced with those rejoicing at the wedding, turning water into wine! And he wept with those who wept -- like at his friend, Lazarus' tomb
11. Jesus unites people from every tribe and tongue
12. And Jesus, associates with the lowly -- he took a repentant thief to paradise with him!  
And he has associated with us.

- He died for us – We who broke his great commandment to love.
- He has forgiven us.
- He has placed us into a new family.
- He has given us new life, and the Spirit's power to love the family of God & this broken world.
- Let's Honor our King with our attitudes and actions.